Center for Folklore Studies
Folklore Archives

<u>Using Pseudonyms for Archival Research for Your Class Paper</u>

<u>Overview & When to use Pseudonyms</u>
When you request and use projects from the Folklore Archives for your own work, you take ownership of the stewardship of those materials. That is, when you receive a scanned student paper and write about it for class, you assume the responsibility to adhere to the expressed wishes and interests of the collectors and informants who generated that work.

Quite a few of the papers from the Student Ethnographic Papers at the Folklore Archives contain restricted material. This is usually indicated on the front few pages of the project in a written statement that says:

> The following material is released and may be subject to public use and publication. In the event of publication, I would prefer that actual names be withheld.

The key portion of this statement is the last clause, "I *would* prefer that actual names be withheld."

For more recent projects, the project release form indicates whether there is full or partial consent, and the extent of that consent. Both the Informant Consent Form and the Collector Consent Form indicate the extent of permissions granted by each individual which governs the use of the project. The Informant Consent Form governs the use of the interview with that informant, and the Collector Consent Form governs the use of the collector's (or students') work.

You should use a pseudonym (a fake name that conceals the identity and identifying markers of the individual) any time that someone (whether the collector or the informant) requests it. Protecting the rights and requests of informants and collectors is an important aspect of conducting archival and folklore research and is just generally a sign of respect for people's autonomy and control over their own stories.

Important: Protecting anonymity applies not only to your classwork, but also to the other ways in which you might share the project information, such as social media of any form. For instance, you should not share photos that include identifying markets from a project that requests the use of pseudonyms unless those markers are concealed. You should also cite the Folklore Archives as the repository that houses that project.

Note: If you end up conducting additional research beyond this class and have to apply for IRB approval from the Human Subjects Review Board, you will have to go through a wholly different process of securing anonymity for your interviewees and research participants. You may, for instance, have to code your interviewees' names and save the code key on an encrypted drive.

How to Generate and Use Pseudonyms

Once you have determined that you need to use a pseudonym for your classwork, select a generic name that can replace the name of the actual student. An easy pseudonym is Brutus Buckeye or John Doe, but you can use other names as well. I would caution against using names that might distract from the content of your paper or otherwise impact the ways that we read the project (such as Harry Butts). Select a name, and then be consistent in the use of that name throughout your paper, especially if you have to use two or more pseudonyms. Use a pseudonym key if you need help keeping the names consistent.

How to Cite Projects for which you use Pseudonyms

When citing a project that uses pseudonyms, use the pseudonym name as the collector or informant name, respectively. That is, if the collector asked to remain anonymous, replace the collector name with the pseudonym. If the informant(s) requested to remain anonymous, replace the informant(s) name(s) with a pseudonym/pseudonyms. For more information about how to cite materials in the Folklore Archives, visit https://cfs.osu.edu/archives/citing-folklore-archives.